

On Guard at

Story and Photos by
SSG Alberto Betancourt

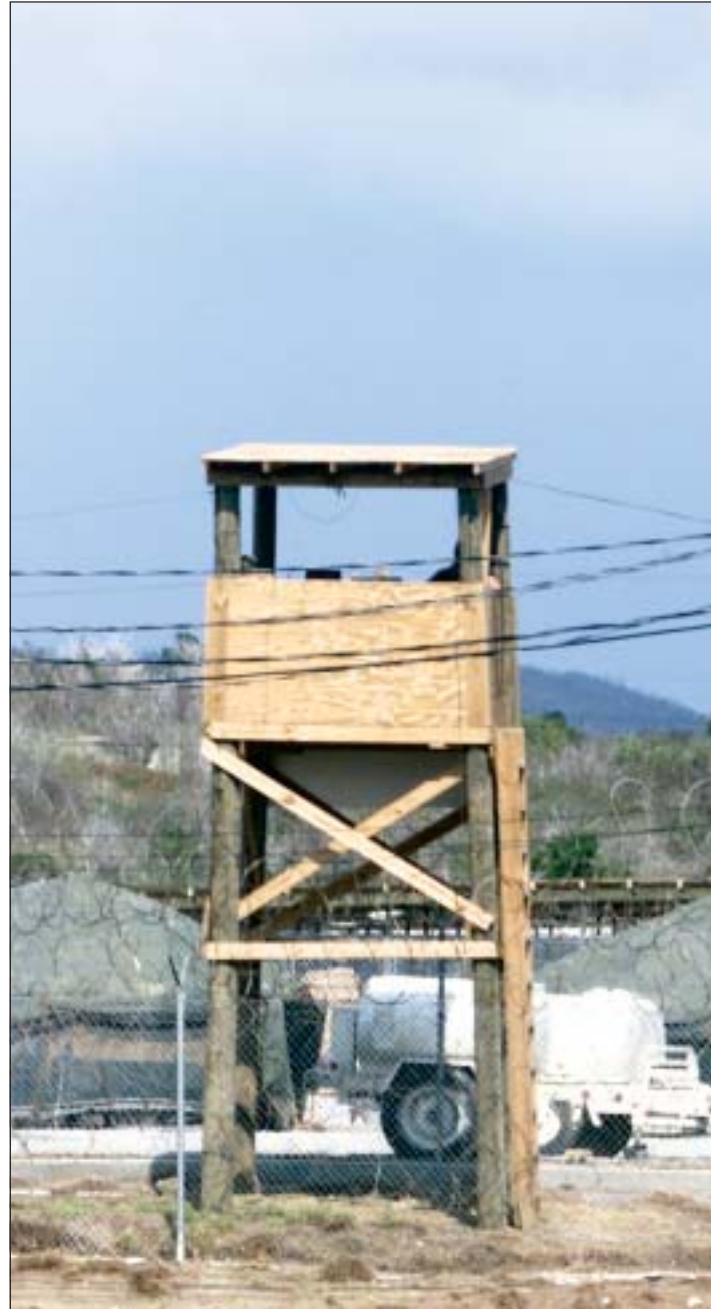
WHEN terrorists attacked the United States on Sept. 11, PV2 Hunter Harshbarger was angry and wanted to immediately join the war on terror. But he couldn't because he was in his sixth week of Basic Combat Training at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

Four months later Harshbarger's wish came true. However, he wasn't in Afghanistan as he'd originally hoped to be, but face to face with Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters detained at Camp X-ray, at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

"I never expected to go to Cuba," he said. "Now that I'm here, I realize that this mission is as important as the mission other soldiers are doing in Afghanistan to support Operation Enduring Freedom."

Harshbarger, from the 988th Military Police Company at Fort Benning, Ga., arrived in Cuba in January to support Joint Task Force-160.

CPT Darrell Sides, commander of the 988th, said that JTF-160's mission is to take custody of designated detainees at the aerial point of embarkation in Kandahar, Afghanistan, from Central Command personnel. The detainees are then transported to a temporary detention facility at "Gitmo."



(Right) The Camp X-ray facility at Guantanamo Bay houses suspected Taliban and al-Qaeda members. **(Left)** "Gitmo" is in the southeast corner of Cuba, some 400 miles from Florida.



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SGT Jason Rauser of the Fort Benning-based 988th MP Co. patrols the inside perimeter of the interrogation facility.

Although his 80 soldiers support JTF-160, Sides said their mission differs from that of other MPs at Camp X-ray.

“Our main mission is supporting JTF-170’s Joint Interagency Interrogation Facility,” he said.

His soldiers go into Camp X-ray and escort detainees out of the camp one at a time, taking them to one of several interview rooms set-up adjacent to the detention facility. The MPs remain with the detainee while various law-enforcement agents and military-intelligence representatives from all the military branches conduct detailed interviews with the detainee. Once the interview is completed, the MPs take the detainee back to his cell.

“These detainees require more

security than a prisoner sitting on death row,” Sides said. “The people on death row generally want to live. Most of the detainees not only want to die, they want to take somebody with them in the process.”

To ensure proper security, there are three MPs assigned to escort each detainee. An MP is on each side of the detainee while an NCO follows closely in the rear, serving as a third set of eyes and communication coordinator with other MPs who guard the detainees inside the facility.

“It takes approximately 10 minutes to get through all the gates inside the

JTF-160 commander BG Rick Baccus addresses the detainees as Navy chaplain Lt. Abuhenia Mohammed looks on.



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detention facility before reaching the interview room,” Sides said.

Because of the uniqueness of the mission in Cuba, the 988th soldiers went through additional training, including cross-training with the infantry.

“We trained in various nonlethal tactics before departing Fort Benning,” said SSG John Barnett. “We’ve also been developing training here as the mission continues.”

Sides said he only has half his company with him in Cuba supporting JTF-160, but all his soldiers have actively supported the nation’s war on terrorism by providing security in different locations.

“One of my platoons was deployed to the Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, Pa., in September,” he said. “Another platoon went to the Pentagon in December.”

The Fort Benning MPs are splitting their tasking between the two platoons. Each platoon works 14 hours a day for two consecutive days, then they’re off for two days.

Living in Freedom Heights, a tent city on a small hill overlooking Camp X-ray, the 988th soldiers are in a tactical environment. When they get time off, they can travel three miles down the road and find



(Above) JTF-160 soldiers assigned to Camp X-ray live in a tent city called “Freedom Heights.”

(Left) Soldiers of the 4th Inf. Div. were the first to live at Camp Alpha, the new quarters for troops supporting JTF-160 at Guantanamo Bay.

(Below) Civilian construction workers walk past the new detention facility that will replace Camp X-ray.



they want to take

themselves in a garrison environment where the aqua waters of the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean invite them in.

“Gitmo has great morale-support facilities,” said Barnett. “Our soldiers have had the opportunity to scuba dive, snorkel, water ski and take part in other water activities.”

But when it’s time to go back to work, the MPs become focused and are serious about their mission.

“I still remember how I felt on Sept. 11,” Harshbarger said. “But we keep our emotions to ourselves. Our company motto is ‘Fair, Firm and Professional.’ We treat the detainees like humans, but we also use every measure to protect ourselves.”

Sides said he’s proud of his soldiers and expects to be part of JTF-160 for at least six months.

“We’re part of JTF-160 working to support JTF-170,” he said. “And JTF-170’s mission is to gather information to prevent further terrorist acts against Americans. This is a very serious mission.” □



Soldiers of the 4th Inf. Div. trained on search techniques before assuming the external security mission at Camp X-ray.

High-Tech Guard Duty

**Story By MSG Debra Bingham
Photos by SSG Alberto Betancourt**



SGT Shelton Gore and SPC Larry Watters of the 988th MP Co. man a guard shack inside the Joint Interagency Interrogation Facility.



SOLDIERS from the Fort Hood, Texas-based 4th Infantry Division recently deployed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to provide security for the camp that houses al-Qaeda and Taliban detainees.

The deployment of the 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, also known as "Task Force Regulars," marked the first time in 10 years that the unit had deployed outside of the United States, battalion members said.

The soldiers are conducting patrols, providing a quick-reaction capability and escorting the detainees, who arrive in-theater by air, said task force commander MAJ Brian Reed.

Being part of the Army's "digital division" means the TF Regulars use some unique equipment to help them conduct their mission, Reed said.

"The Force 21 Battlefield Command Brigade and Below system, or FBCB2, gives us a comprehensive picture of the operational area," Reed said. "We can track the progress of convoys and monitor observation points, and communicate over a secure network."

The infantrymen also have the Long Range Advanced Scout Surveillance System, a sensor with thermal capability and a sighting system that can zoom in on objects more than 20 kilometers away.

"We've transitioned to a nonlethal-based mission in Cuba. It requires a change of mindset, so we've trained with the MPs on nonlethal means of controlling situations," said CPT Jason Westbrook, commander of Company B, 1st Bn., 22nd Inf.

Before heading to Cuba, the TF Regulars took part in specialized training at Fort Hood. Formal instruction and hands-on training at the Military Operations on Urbanized Terrain complex added a touch of realism.

With mock city buildings and burned buses as a backdrop, the soldiers learned squad and platoon movements, self-defense tactics and riot-control techniques. They also picked up some new equipment — riot helmets and shields, and batons.

Then they suited up and faced a group of "rioters" to test themselves and their new skills.

The skills the TF Regulars learned will serve them well, Reed said.

"Eleven years ago we had a Cold War focus. We've expanded our mission horizon since then with Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo. Now, with the war on terrorism, we need to be able to respond to a different contingency. We're not purely warfighters, we also have to exercise restraint and focus on the humanitarian side," Reed said.

"We are taking part in the nation's war against terrorism," he added. "We're not just training anymore." □

MSG Debra Bingham works with the 4th Infantry Division PAO.



CPL Angel Murillo of 1st Bn., 22nd Inf., barks out commands during one of the several training sessions 4th Inf. Div. soldiers underwent.